

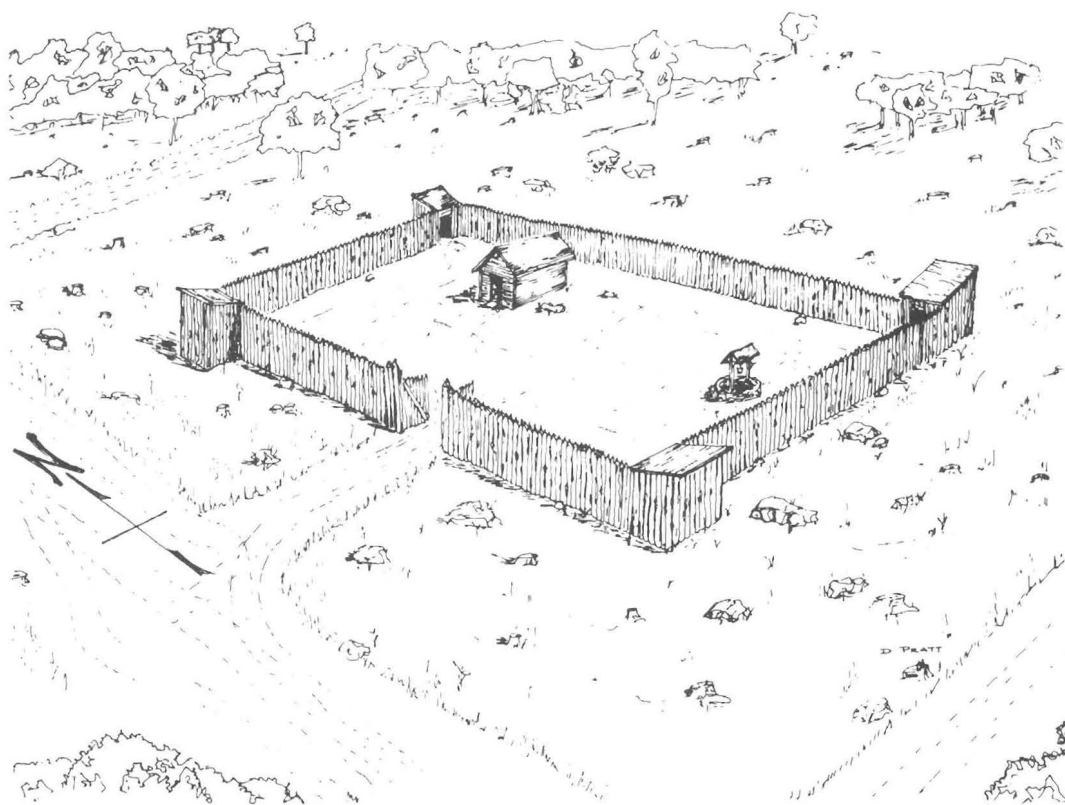
RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY RUTLAND (Part II)



Fort Rutland was a Revolutionary War fort, probably built in 1775, at the northeast corner of present day North Main Street and Terrill Street. According to Henry Hall's 1848 description of the fort, it was oblong in shape, about 132 feet east and west and 165 feet north and south. Twenty foot maple logs sharpened at the top (called pickets) were sunk about five feet in the ground. The logs were hewn smooth on their sides, which touched each other. At each corner there was an eight foot square structure (called a flanker or redoubt), so that each side could be covered by rifle or musket fire from the corresponding flanker. Port holes for muskets ringed the fort every six feet. The only gate was on the west side, a little south of the center of the wall. In July, 1777, the fort was burned by the citizens, as they retreated in the face of General John Burgoyne's advance down the Champlain Valley.

II. Revolutionary Rutland (1775-1783)

by James S. Davidson

Vermont and Rutland assumed an early role in the Revolution when the Green Mountain Boys captured Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775. Among the heroes of the expedition was Gershom Beach, a Rutland blacksmith, who made a journey of sixty miles on foot over wooded terrain to gather men from the area for the attack on Ticonderoga. The journey was all the more amazing as it was completed in twenty-four hours, an exploit that certainly rivaled Paul Revere's ride. Numerous other Rutland men joined in the actual capture of Ticonderoga.¹

Following the victory at Ticonderoga, many Vermonters, including a number from Rutland, joined the ill-fated attempt to invade Canada in the fall of 1775. With the retreat of the American Army from Canada in the summer of 1776 and the consequent danger to the Vermont frontier, the inhabitants of the New Hampshire Grants petitioned the New Hampshire military authorities for ammunition to supply a force to protect the frontier area so that they could gather crops. The petition, signed for the most part by men from Rutland and neighboring towns, indicated that Rutland and the other towns along the frontier were destitute in the face of a serious British threat.²

Meanwhile Vermonters, who had successfully opposed the rule of New York, petitioned the Continental Congress that they not be required to serve the Revolutionary cause under the New York Provincial Congress. A committee of the Continental Congress moved that Vermont "submit to New York without prejudice." However, the motion was withdrawn.³

In 1776 Vermonters moved to establish Vermont as a separate district that recognized the New Hampshire Grants. A series of conventions then took steps that finally culminated in Vermont's Declaration of Independence as a free and independent state on January 16, 1777. Captain Joseph Bowker, a Rutland delegate who had come to Rutland in 1773, was chosen chairman of each of these conventions but one. In July 1777, a constitutional convention met and formed a constitution for Vermont. This convention appointed a Committee of Safety to conduct affairs until the government could be organized.⁴

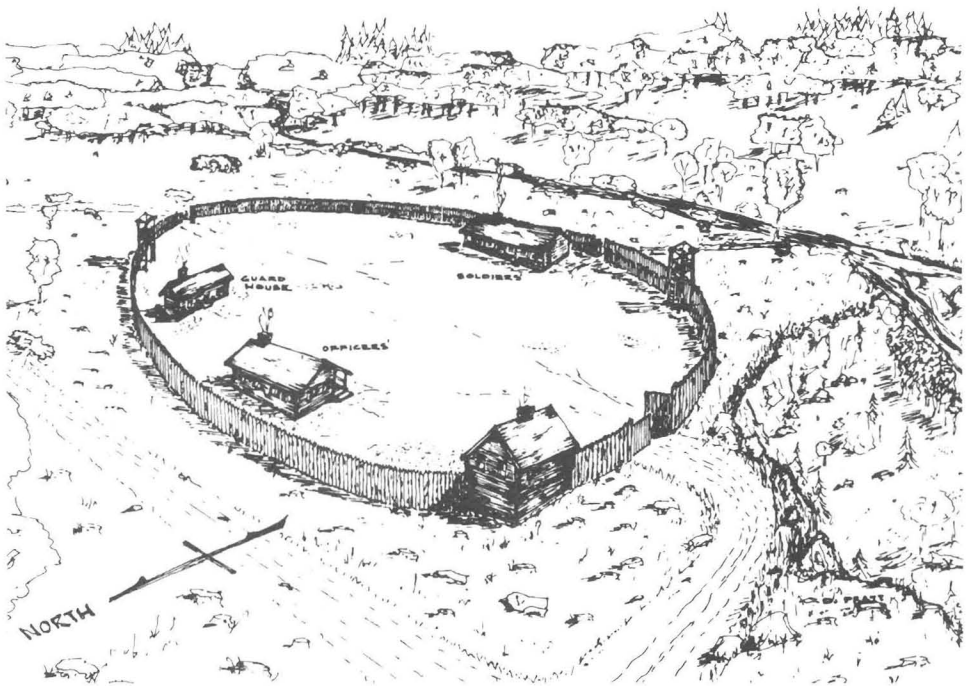
On the military scene, the British General John Burgoyne and his Indian allies began to move south with the American army retreating in front. On July 7, 1777, the American rear guard fought a delaying action at Hubbardton, Vermont, about ten miles northwest of Rutland, thus allowing General Arthur St. Clair and the American army to retreat through Rutland and to the south. As he retreated, General St. Clair directed the Vermont militia that were with him to remain at Rutland for the protection of the people on the frontier. All the cattle to the north of Rutland were ordered removed and all carriages of use to the enemy were to be taken or destroyed. Most people moved to Rutland or further south, leaving the area to the north a "no man's land." Two days after the retreat at Hubbardton, General St. Clair ventured the opinion that the people of the Rutland area had "little to fear except the depredation of a few Indians."⁵ However, many inhabitants apparently did not share General St. Clair's opinion of the danger. After burning Fort Rutland, a small

picquet fort, most inhabitants fled, at least temporarily, from the Rutland area. And perhaps their flight was wise for a letter dated July 21, 1777, which was received by Mesheck Weare, a New Hampshire leader, indicated that the main body of General Friedrich von Reidesel's German troops was at Rutland.⁶

In the fall of 1777 Burgoyne's advance ended in disaster for him at Saratoga. But even with this turn of events, Rutland was not removed from all danger. Although the frontier was not attacked again by a force comparable to Burgoyne's, there were still numerous incursions and threats of invasion by the Indians and their Tory allies.⁷

Vermont made plans in early 1778 to invade Canada. Colonel James Mead of Rutland was to have commanded one of the six militia regiments contemplated for the invasion, but the plans never materialized.⁸

Upon the organization of the state government in 1778, Rutland was selected as the Military Headquarters and Fort Ranger, which enclosed over two acres, was



Fort Ranger became the military headquarters of the independent republic of Vermont in 1778. It was located on the plateau of land north of Otter Creek and south of present Route 4 west near Mead's Falls between the old Center Rutland burying ground and the railroad bridge over Route 4. According to Henry Hall's 1848 description, the fort was made of unhewn hemlock logs sharpened at the top (called pickets) inclining slightly outwards. These 20 foot logs were sunk five feet deep in a trench. Eight foot logs filled the space between pickets to provide a bullet-proof wall. The fort was elliptical, or oval, in shape. It enclosed an area of over two acres and could accommodate between 200 and 300 men. There were large plank gates on the east and west sides. On the south side there was a wicket gate that led to Otter Creek. In the northwest part there was a 30 or 40 foot square blockhouse of hewn logs. It was two stories high, with a shingled roof. Town records indicate that several town meetings were held within the fort.

erected at Center Rutland near the "Little Falls" where it served as the principal supply depot for troops stationed at Pittsford, Castleton and Rutland. Undoubtedly Rutland's central location and the surrounding amphitheater of mountains made the choice of Rutland, at the head of the Champlain Valley, a logical one. In addition, Rutland controlled Otter Creek, which had been used for decades by Indians moving south and east from Lake Champlain, and Crown Point Military Road, which cut through the Green Mountains to the east.⁹

On June 13, 1778, a party of five hundred Indians and Tories was reported at Crown Point about thirty-five miles northwest of Rutland. These raiders had just returned from a scalping tour of Tryon County, New York, where they had taken a number of prisoners. On the same day Vermont authorities dispatched men and supplies north to Rutland to meet the expected attack, but no major battle ensued.¹⁰

In 1779 Vermont began to take further steps for the defense of the frontier. At its session in February 1779, the Legislature established a militia law which made all males between sixteen and fifty years old eligible for militia duty with few exceptions.¹¹ In March 1779, the Board of War established a frontier line consisting of the north line of Castleton and the north and west lines of Pittsford to the foot of the Green Mountains. All inhabitants north of this line were ordered to move within the line. Picquet forts were built at Pittsford and Castleton. Ammunition and provisions were supplied by the Vermont Military Headquarters at Fort Ranger in Rutland.¹²

During the winter of 1778-1779 Vermont faced a new problem. The military activities of 1777 and 1778 had prevented both civilians and military personnel from raising and harvesting crops. Consequently, a severe shortage of provisions on the northern frontiers made it difficult for men to remain in service and provide food for their families or the army. In the spring of 1779 Governor Thomas Chittenden of Vermont requested military aid from General George Washington for the summer of 1779 so that Vermont men might be freed to grow and harvest food. Without such help it would be impossible to prevent inhabitants from moving south with their families and what effects they could carry. This development would make it difficult, if not impractical, to hold the frontier line that had been established in March 1779. But continental troops were apparently never forwarded.¹³

During the summer of 1779 Vermont raised one hundred and fifty men to serve at Rutland and on the frontier. On July 27th the Rutland inhabitants petitioned the Board of War for additional assistance in guarding the frontier. Captain Thomas Sawyer, commander of the post at Rutland, also sent a letter requesting assistance. In response a company of Rangers was dispatched and they arrived at Rutland in mid-August.¹⁴

During the latter part of 1779 and the early months of 1780, the Congress of the confederation was weighing recognition of Vermont's independence against the support of New York's claims. Meanwhile eight leaders of Vermont carried on one of the most ingenious and/or ambivalent secret negotiations in history, formally called the Haldimand Negotiations.¹⁵

In 1778 the British government had given its representatives power to offer terms of peace to the colonies generally or separately. In March 1779, Lord George Ger-

maine ordered General Frederick Haldimand, British commander in Canada, to open negotiations with Vermont. In September 1779, Haldimand replied that the Vermonters were a "profligate banditti" but he would do what he could. In March 1780, Germaine again urged the importance of drawing Vermont to the British side. Accordingly, Colonel Beverly Robinson, who had succeeded in obtaining the treason of Benedict Arnold, composed a letter to Ethan Allen which suggested the possibility of an independent role for Vermont within the British Empire. When Allen received the letter in July 1780, he read it and said he would consider it. Governor Thomas Chittenden of Vermont and a few others were immediately informed of the situation.¹⁶

In July 1780, Governor Chittenden suggested that the tyranny of the American Confederation would leave Vermont with little reason to continue hostilities with Great Britain. But General Haldimand reported that there could be no dependence on the word of Ethan Allen or those around him. In October 1780, Allen forwarded a messenger who expressed that Vermonters were fed up with New York's treatment and the constant alarms caused by threatened British invasion. The British replied to Allen that a cessation of arms would be granted as much as possible but not a truce.¹⁷

By February 1781, New York was nearly ready to give up its opposition to Vermont's entrance into the American Confederation. Only the objections of diehard Governor George Clinton remained. Meanwhile Vermont had moved to unite a part of western New Hampshire to Vermont. By April 1781, some eastern New York towns had also petitioned to become a part of Vermont.¹⁸

In the summer of 1781 General Haldimand began to be concerned that the Vermonters had only used the negotiations to deal more effectively with the Confederation Congress. However, he still held some hope of success and proceeded to extend the cessation of arms. In the late summer of 1781 British agents reported that the Vermonters expected to secure themselves by truce, cartel and negotiations until they could see the results of the negotiations at Vienna. But a meeting with Ira Allen and Joseph Fay at Skenesborough, New York, in early October 1781, almost entirely convinced General Haldimand of Vermont sincerity. As a result, Vermont again escaped serious offensive operations by the British. In late November 1781, word of the surrender of General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown left General Haldimand with little hope of bringing the Vermont negotiations to a successful close.¹⁹

By means of the Haldimand Negotiations the artful Vermonters had kept the British from launching any major offensive campaigns from 1780 until the end of the war. Just when Vermont seemed in an almost defenseless position, a group of her leaders had performed the impossible. In addition, the negotiations did a great deal to pressure the American Confederation Congress into recognizing Vermont's position against New York's claims.²⁰

The Revolution in Vermont thus turned into a series of alarms to raise militia troops to meet the dangers posed by frequent Indian and Tory scouting expeditions. As late as the spring of 1782 there was still concern about raising sufficient men to meet these Indian and Tory threats.²¹

Rutland inhabitants seemingly had little Tory sentiment, whereas Tory sympathizers probably constituted a majority of the people in Clarendon, where most of the friends

of New York were British sympathizers and took protection papers from General Burgoyne. The four Tory estates confiscated in Rutland probably constituted a grand total of Tory sentiment there. It was highly improbable that any estates would escape confiscation as Captain Joseph Bowker and Colonel James Claghorn, both of Rutland, were district commissioners for the confiscation and sale of Tory properties.²²

On the positive side, there was a sizable local support for the Revolutionary cause. Nearly two hundred different inhabitants of Rutland served with the militia or Continental units at various times, including fifty who attained some leadership role.²³

Direct local support of the war was encouraged by an act of the Vermont General Assembly passed in March 1780, which empowered the inhabitants of a town to tax themselves for a variety of reasons. At a town meeting on May 10, 1780, Rutland freemen showed further support for the war by voting a tax rate of four pence per pound, as money went in 1774, to pay Rutland people for scouting.²⁴

Meanwhile the food supply problems in Vermont continued. The transportation of food products outside of the state, except for the use of Continental troops or with the permission of the Governor and three of his Council, was forbidden by the Legislature in March 1780. In November 1780, quotas for military provisions to be provided by each town were made into law. Accordingly, on December 14, 1780, the people of Rutland voted a tax rate of one shilling and two pence per pound to raise provisions for the Army on the frontiers.²⁵

The Revolutionary sentiment of Rutland was well illustrated by the story of Nathan Tuttle. In 1777, when many people fled south in fear of Burgoyne's advance, Nathan was among those who remained in Rutland. On one occasion, Nathan, who had been drinking very freely, met Solomon Johns and Gustavus Spencer who had come to Rutland with a scouting party of Indians and Tories. They accosted and threatened Tuttle, who dared them to touch him. Whereupon Johns ran him through with a bayonet, killing him instantly. Then they weighted his body and threw him into Otter Creek below the "Little Falls" and escaped. Although Tuttle's behavior had been foolhardy, it well represented the fiercely independent spirit of Rutland's early inhabitants during the American Revolution.²⁶

Rutland was neither the earliest nor the largest community in the area, but it seemed to have gathered an especially aggressive group of "the most active and rebellious race of the continent," whether they were opposing "Yorkers" or "Tories."²⁷ Although a temporary population of soldiers, who manned Fort Ranger, and refugees from the north did much to fill the town and stimulate its economy, most inhabitants of Rutland appear to have remained during most of the Revolution. Thus the community was able to maintain a continuity throughout the Revolution which communities to the north were not able to do.²⁸

CREDITS

Sketch of Ft. Rutland, Daniel J. Pratt, Rutland Historical Society.
Sketch of Ft. Ranger, Daniel J. Pratt, Rutland Historical Society.

BACK NOTES

¹Edward Conant, A.M., *A Textbook of the Geography, History, Constitution and Civil Government of Vermont*, 6th ed., revised and enlarged by Mason S. Stone (Rutland, Vt., 1915), pp. 161-164; Ralph N. Hill, *Yankee Kingdom* (New York, 1960), p. 71; Crockett, I, 421-445, 476; Rev. William Cogswell, D.D., ed., *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, I: 2 (1847), 170; John E. Goodrich, comp. and ed., *The State of Vermont: Rolls of Soldiers in the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783* (Rutland, Vt., 1904), pp. 831-833. There is some dispute whether Samuel or Gershom Beach made this journey. Its importance is that it was done.

²Goodrich, *Rolls*, pp. 4-5, 655; Crockett, I, 530-531.

³Crockett, II, 172-176; E[liakim] P[ersons] Walton, ed., *Records of the Council of Safety and the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont to which are prefixed the Records of the General Conventions from July 1775 to December 1777* (hereafter cited as *G. & C.*) (Montpelier, Vt., 1873-1880), I, 16-20.

⁴Crockett, II, 178-179, 185, 193, 196, 204; *G. & C.*, I, 15-47, 62-75.

⁵Conant, pp. 168-170, 179; Crockett, II, 45-86; Lamson, p. 99; *G. & C.*, I, 74, n. 3 - Letter from Gen. Arthur St. Clair to Jonas Fay, Vt. Secretary of State.

⁶Chauncey Kilborn Williams, [Notes for a history] MS (Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vt.), I, 27-28; Crockett, II, 94.

⁷Crockett, II, 256-270.

⁸Crockett, II, 260; *G. & C.*, I, 216 n. 2; Goodrich, *Rolls*, p. 785.

⁹Crockett, II, 244-245, 265; *G. & C.*, I, 301; Caverly, p. 165; Thompson, Pt. III, 153; Benjamin H. Hall, *History of Eastern Vermont from its Earliest Settlement to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1858), pp. 21-23; Smith and Rann, p. 304. Ft. Ranger could hold 200-300 men.

¹⁰*G. & C.*, I, 266-267.

¹¹Crockett, II, 229; Allen Soule, ed., *Laws of Vermont, 1777-1780; State Papers of Vermont, XII* (Montpelier, Vermont, 1964), 57-65. (The *State Papers of Vermont* will hereafter be cited as *S.P. of Vt.*)

¹²Crockett, II, 262-263, 265; Caverly, p. 165; *G. & C.*, I, 295-296, 301.

¹³*G. & C.*, I, 292-293.

¹⁴*G. & C.*, I, 304-306, 308 n.l. A company usually consisted of fifty men.

¹⁵Crockett, II, 300-302, 338-340. The correspondence of these negotiations can be found in *G. & C.*, II, Appendix I, 396-484. See also John A. Williams, ed., *The Public Papers of Governor Thomas Chittenden; S.P. of Vt. XVII* (Montpelier, Vt., 1969), Chapter Four - The Haldimand Negotiations, 1779-1783, pp. 323-388.

¹⁶Crockett, II, 314-316.

¹⁷Crockett, II, 303-304, 316-317.

¹⁸Crockett, II, 309, 350-357.

¹⁹Crockett, II, 327-333.

²⁰Crockett, II, 343-344.

²¹Goodrich, *Rolls*, p. 774 and *passim*; TR, I, 232.

²²Crockett, II, 272; Mary Greene Nye, ed., *Sequestrations, Confiscation and Sale of Estates [Loyalist Material, 1777-1822]: S.P. of Vt., VI* (Montpelier, Vt., 1941), 9, 17-18; Hemenway, III, 1016; *G. & C.*, I, 190-191, 198. This confiscation and sale of Tory properties provided the bulk of monies for the Vermont war effort and enabled Vermont to finish the war relatively debt free.

²³Unpublished study by the author based on Goodrich, *Rolls*. This number undoubtedly represented a large majority of the Rutland males of militia age.

²⁴Soule, *S.P. of Vt., XII*, 189; TR, I, 98.

²⁵Crockett, II, 229-230; Soule, *S.P. of Vt., XII*, 191, 212-216; TR, I, 119.

²⁶Smith and Rann, p. 319 n; S. K. Williams, [Notes...], I, 29-30.

²⁷Letter from General John Burgoyne to Lord George Germaine written after the Battle of Bennington and quoted in part in Crockett, II, 150.

²⁸Based on an informal analysis of town records during the Revolution. In particular, see TR, I, II, *passim*; PR, *passim*; Goodrich, *Rolls*, *passim*.

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